



STRATEGIC FRAMEWORK FOR THE IINNII INITIATIVE

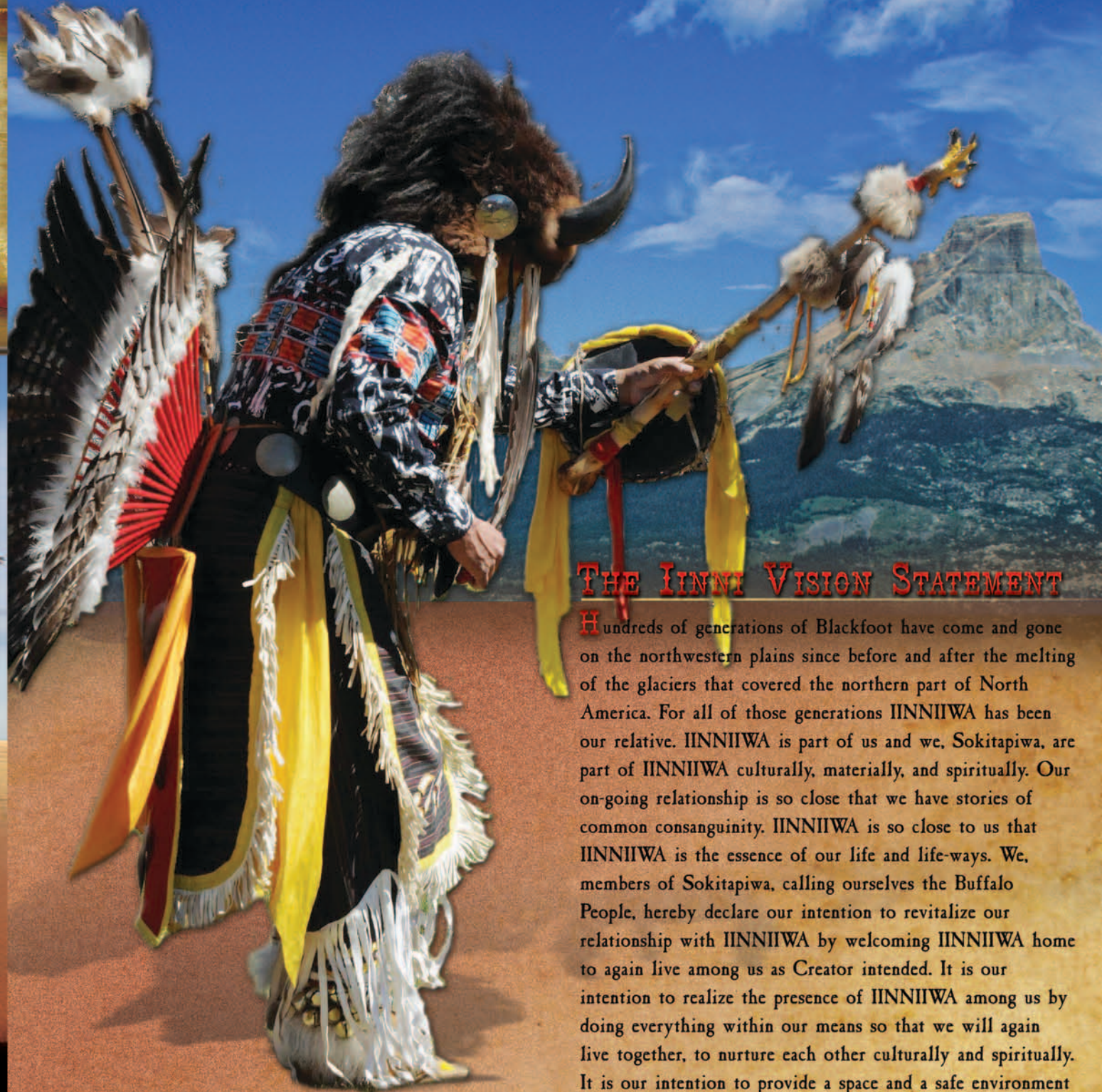


The Iinnii Initiative
 c/o The Wildlife Conservation Society
 301 N. Wilson Ave
 406-522-9333 ext 106
 kaunc@wcs.org

CAN BUFFALO BE RETURNED TO BLACKFEET COUNTRY?



The Iinnii Initiative



THE IINNII VISION STATEMENT

Hundreds of generations of Blackfoot have come and gone on the northwestern plains since before and after the melting of the glaciers that covered the northern part of North America. For all of those generations IINNIIWA has been our relative. IINNIIWA is part of us and we, Sokitapiwa, are part of IINNIIWA culturally, materially, and spiritually. Our on-going relationship is so close that we have stories of common consanguinity. IINNIIWA is so close to us that IINNIIWA is the essence of our life and life-ways. We, members of Sokitapiwa, calling ourselves the Buffalo People, hereby declare our intention to revitalize our relationship with IINNIIWA by welcoming IINNIIWA home to again live among us as Creator intended. It is our intention to realize the presence of IINNIIWA among us by doing everything within our means so that we will again live together, to nurture each other culturally and spiritually. It is our intention to provide a space and a safe environment for IINNIIWA so that together we can again nurture our land, our holy plants, and our animal relatives so that we can both realize the Buffalo Ways for our future generations.



Beginning in May 2010, members of the Blackfeet Confederacy held a series of transboundary dialogues that brought Blackfeet people together to create a grassroots restoration vision. These elders and tribal members held a traditional dialogue where they shared relevant spiritual, cultural and political views and spoke passionately about the return of ii-nii-wa, health of the land, and well being of the Blackfeet people. Themes discussed during these dialogues included:

- 🌍 **Connectedness:**
 - Strengthening cultural, spiritual, ecological connections with the land and wildlife.
 - The importance of connecting youth to nature.
- 🌍 **Healing the land:** Nurturing the health of our land.
- 🌍 **Healing the people:**
 - Healthy lands lead to healthy people
 - Returning bison as a nutritious food source will improve health.
 - Bison are integral to the spiritual and cultural well-being of Blackfeet People.
- 🌍 **Conceiving a vision:** They issued a call for the return of iinniwa to nurture land and people.

There are 3 key components to achieving this vision of an enduring conservation and cultural legacy and the return of buffalo to Blackfeet Country.

- 1. Preserve an enduring conservation landscape:**
The northern portion of Rocky Mountain Front in Montana and Alberta offers one of the last opportunities to restore and preserve all native wildlife including a full complement of carnivores in a largely intact landscape.
- 2. Restore bison to this spectacular landscape:** After a 125 year absence, it is possible to restore American buffalo, which are central to the historical, cultural and ecological legacy of this region, conveying multiple benefits to Blackfeet and providing native peoples the opportunity to reconnect with a living symbol of their ancient culture.
- 3. Connect restoration efforts to the economic sustainability of communities:** By conserving important lands, returning bison to those landscapes and protecting ecological health, new economic opportunities will emerge for the people and communities along the front. These nature-based business opportunities will sustain conservation efforts over the long-term.



America's Northern Plains region has undergone over a century of degradation. Despite this ongoing degradation, the Rocky Mountain Front in the traditional territory of Blackfeet People still offers some of the last relatively intact habitats where deer, elk, grizzly bears and wolves still roam. Bison, an iconic species so important to North American natural history, are one of a few species still missing from this landscape. The Iinnii Initiative calls on the Blackfeet People to develop a new vision for the conservation of lands on the Rocky Mountain Front to help protect Blackfeet culture and to create a homeland for ii-nnii-wa (buffalo). Realizing this vision will contribute to the economy and create jobs through new nature based business opportunities.